

Robert Lawlor Tells a ‘White’ Lie

Mitchell Rolls

Over the last decade a considerable and growing body of literature has appeared in which Aborigines are proffered as the bearers of the primal knowledge and long-lost cultural mechanisms that are required for the successful reintegration of an ailing West and its constituency of alienated selves. The literature urging the appropriation of Aboriginal cultural property for these purposes is filtered through a range of ideologies, theories and faiths. Most of the authors write from the perspective of personal experience, using either their work with Aborigines, or more commonly, a journey to where they believe the last vestiges of ‘true’ Aboriginality can still be found, as the basis of their accounts in which Aborigines appear as the restorative agents needed by the West or themselves.¹ Their harnessing of Aborigines to their private agendas is done without calling on extensive anthropological or historical support. However, their constructions of Aborigines — as an ancient people inhabiting changeless cultures that harbour sacred knowledge and sociocultural practices once shared by all humankind in the dawn of consciousness or some other imagined early phase — rely very much on notions developed under anthropological models that no longer enjoy currency.

Robert Lawlor’s *Voices of the First Day: Awakening in the Aboriginal Dreamtime* is one such study.² Not only does Lawlor typically construct Aborigines and their cultures in ways that serve his own interests and purpose, he attempts to authenticate his constructions through citing references. The respected and reputable work of others is used to render his fictions as fact. As this is one of the few books advocating the appropriation of Aboriginal cultural property that relies extensively on anthropological and historical sources as opposed to the claim of personal experience, a close examination of how some of the sources are used is warranted.

The fact that the scholarly pretence of this book — that promises accessible rather than recondite anthropology — appears to have conferred upon Lawlor the status of an authority on Aborigines, is another reason it warrants discussion. For instance, Lawlor has been called in as an ‘expert’ by those seeking to debunk Marlo Morgan’s controversial *Mutant Message Down Under*.³ In an otherwise reasonably thorough exposé of Morgan’s account of her travels across Australia with an Aboriginal ‘tribe’, Elaine Adams in the *Kansas City Star* quotes Lawlor as one of the ‘experts’ doubting the veracity of Morgan’s claims, and she describes him as the ‘author of a highly acclaimed book on Aborigines’.⁴ Susan Wyndham, in a well-researched article for the *Australian Magazine*, raises no questions about Lawlor being consulted as an informed source by the sceptical publisher who first held the rights to *Mutant Message*.⁵ Even more surprising is Gareth Griffiths’ acceptance of Lawlor as a credible commentator on Morgan’s book. In an article concerned with the issue of nonsense pertaining to Aborigines and their cultures and how this seems to effortlessly cross the boundaries of a marginal New Age subset and gain credibility in reputable and influential arenas, Griffiths approvingly cites Lawlor’s contribution to the article in the *Kansas City Star*.⁶ But as Barry Hill notes, Lawlor’s *Voices* ‘takes all strands of New Age religion and weaves them into a notion of

Aboriginal culture'.⁷ As I will now discuss, if the New Age is the warp in this weaving then misrepresentations of Aboriginality are the weft.

For Lawlor, the West is a monolithic, homogenous culture 'engrossed in its own destruction'.⁸ Aborigines, however, representatives in this text of all that is good, have in the Dreaming the knowledge needed to not only secure the West's survival, but that of the Earth itself. To this end Lawlor positions Aboriginal culture as the antithesis of all he finds wanting in his own:

Everything in Aboriginal life — childrearing; food gathering, sharing, and cooking; marriage, infidelity, taboos, and the structure of family, clan, and tribe; burial practices; methods for dealing with crime — defines a world view utterly different from ours, yet urgently relevant to our need to transform the way we exist in the world.⁹

The reason for this polarised difference between Western and Aboriginal cultures is that Aborigines have retained in the Dreaming the 'lost memory' 'of the origin of life'.¹⁰ In this way Lawlor counters Western modernity with primal primitivism, and just as the attributes of the mythical Wild Man, when invoked as a form of sociocultural critique, were changed according to the needs of successive generations, Lawlor invents Aborigines that best suit his purpose.¹¹

As this purpose needs Aborigines to be humankind's sociocultural primogenitors, Lawlor proposes that Australia, and specifically Tasmania is humanity's cradle.¹² The physical and cultural differences between the Tasmanians and the mainlanders suggests to Lawlor that the former 'are an older, earlier people, perhaps as old as the speculated 400,000 year origin of *Homo sapiens* in Australia'.¹³ Exemplifying Memmi's observation that colonisers champion 'the least progressive features' of the colonised,¹⁴ Lawlor finds 'purity' in the technological simplicity of the Tasmanian tools,¹⁵ and submits that this reflects 'more orthodox adherence to the ideal of the sacred value of the earth',¹⁶ and the desire to live life according to 'original law'.¹⁷ As Bernheimer states of the wild and natural man, Lawlor believes that the 'abstention from all that enriches life materially shields primitive man from the vices of avarice and trickery and bellicosity'.¹⁸ The Tasmanians are exemplars for they alone have retained the 'simplest, purest' pre-stone age wood-based culture.¹⁹

Because Lawlor's construction of the Tasmanian Aborigines is essential to his thesis of origins, I will first use his arguments concerning them to provide examples of his misleading and careless use of sources. For instance, he cites Bernard Smith's chapter in *Seeing the First Australians* as the source for a paragraph describing how in 1772 French explorers sighted the Tasmanian Aborigines and found them 'an exceptionally peaceful, joyous, and open people'.²⁰ He goes on to say that these accounts of the happy primitives contributed to Rousseau developing his ideas on the noble savage. But Smith's chapter actually focuses on Cook's first voyage, one that did not visit Tasmania, and hence is totally irrelevant to Lawlor's discussion. Additionally, Lawlor is wrong in fact. Marion du Fresne was the Frenchman that encountered the Tasmanian Aborigines in 1772. Whilst he was *anticipating* meeting Lawlor's 'exceptionally peaceful, joyous, and open people', misunderstandings on first contact led to immediate hostilities resulting in several Aborigines being killed and others wounded. Fresne himself was wounded in the skirmish.²¹ This encounter could hardly have contributed to the image of the noble savage. Nor could any account in 1772 feed into Rousseau's development of the concept. His *Discourse*

on the Origin and Foundation of Inequality Among Mankind was published in 1755. Instead of contributing to the fruition of an imagined ideal as Lawlor claims, Fresne's experiences hastened its destruction.

The attribution of fabricated evidence to respected historical and anthropological sources as documentation substantiating the existence of his mythologised people is found throughout. Lawlor's references for a paragraph arguing that the first Europeans to see Tasmanian Aborigines reported that they 'were a well-nourished, physically strong, radiant, and energetic people ... [who] spent more time in song, dance, and ceremony than did mainland Aboriginal tribes', are pages in *Seeing the First Australians* that correspond with James Urry's chapter on 'Savage Sportsmen'.²² Once again the pages referred to, indeed the entire essay, have nothing to do with the point Lawlor is attempting to substantiate.

Much attracted to the Tasmanians' nudity — on the grounds that it showed freedom from inhibition (it did not), and greater empathy with the environment — Lawlor includes observations made by both Cook and Joseph Banks on the state of Aboriginal undress and attests they refer to Tasmanian Aborigines. Cook's comments are attributed to '[Cook's] first Tasmanian journals'.²³ Yet the cited observations of both men were made during the Endeavour's first voyage — which, as noted, did not visit Tasmania. Glyndwr Williams, Lawlor's source, does not erroneously displace these journal references. The fabrication is Lawlor's. As his theories rely on such misleading attributions for substantiating evidence, one must suspect their deliberateness. And given that Lawlor's book poses as a well researched work supported by the authority of his references — a reviewer for *Booklist* declared his research to be 'impeccable' — these deceptions are serious.²⁴

One of the many problems facing the world that Lawlor argues Aborigines consciously avoided is that of environmental degradation. Ignoring considerable evidence to the contrary, he presents Aborigines as knowing and deliberate conservationists who live at one with the natural world. He argues that 'in 100,000 to 150,000 years the Aborigines' impact on the fragile environment of Australia has been minimal', and that 'no other culture has had such a gentle effect on the natural environment as that of the Aborigines'.²⁵ To support these claims he imagines the traits of a people he requires, and then again imposes these upon Tasmanian Aborigines. Seeking to discount the environmental impact of 'fire-stick' farming, his argument is that the Tasmanians, who did not make fire, may have restricted its use to sacred purposes only due to foresight as to its ecological consequences.²⁶ He asserts that although 'fire-stick farming' was once practised it had ceased, and the inference is that the cessation occurred thousands of years before the present.²⁷

The factors indicating that Tasmanian Aborigines were still regularly firing tracts of country at the time of colonisation are many, and all of the sources that Lawlor has used as reference material document these. For instance, Lesueur, the artist aboard Baudin's expedition of 1803, sketched a family setting coastal grasses alight.²⁸ I refer to this particular example because Lawlor cites from the volume in which it appears a number of times, therefore he is almost certainly aware of it. Furthermore, Lyndall Ryan makes no less than five references to the practice in her opening chapter,²⁹ a chapter we know Lawlor has read for elsewhere it is cited as a source for other information; and Josephine Flood, another of Lawlor's key references, summarises other research in detailing not only that Aborigines continued to burn country at the time of colonisation, but that their employment of fire brought

fundamental changes to Tasmania's vegetation in a number of areas.³⁰ Hence from his own sources Lawlor must be aware that Tasmanian Aborigines had not ceased 'fire-stick farming' as he claims. As he provides no data from any source that suggests otherwise, nor has he made any attempt to explain how he has reached a conclusion that differs so dramatically from the information contained in his references, one has little choice but to read this as a deliberate attempt to mislead. Whilst in the introduction Lawlor admits that in his 'attempt to show the meaning [that the 'eternal' Aboriginal] tradition holds for our times, [he] may have made errors of interpretation',³¹ this is but one of many examples that cannot be glibly swept into the exculpatory embrace of interpretative error.

In parts Two, Three and Four of *Voices of the First Day*, Lawlor declares he intends to 'examine the mysteries, rituals, and symbolism of the Australian Aborigines, as well as the details of their traditional daily life'.³² Such a statement implies that what is to follow will be factual, or at least based on evidence. This is not the case, however. Rather, Lawlor uses it as a further opportunity to continue to construct, supposedly from anthropological sources, his mythologised people. The focus remains one of presenting Aborigines as enjoying a utopian existence, their imagined culture devoid of all problems besetting Western cultures.

As apparent from Lawlor's subscription to the now frequently propounded notion that Aborigines are the bearers of archaic but essential forms of knowledge that have been lost by the West, he conceives of Aboriginal cultural practices as being ahistorical and therefore ancient, stable and unchanging. To this end he asserts that birthing rituals 'have, with only slight variation, been rigorously observed for more than 100,000 years'.³³ What evidence can he possibly provide to support such a claim? Nevertheless, the concept of a society unchanged for over 100,000 years due to rigorous adherence to the Dreaming laws is stressed repeatedly, including the statement that Aborigines have been repainting their cave art over the same stretch of time, another claim which cannot be substantiated.³⁴ Thus Lawlor's text is another recent example propounding the familiar but dated notion that only the West is 'in time' so to speak; Aborigines exist outside of it, locked into a perpetuating past. His Aborigines continue to inhabit the long-rejected anthropological myth of indigenous cultures being 'always identical to themselves in the homogenous space of an eternal present'.³⁵ But as Kim Akerman notes, the archaeological record demonstrates that pre-colonial Aboriginal cultures were the product of 50,000 or more years of change, much of which was produced by internal dynamism.³⁶ Although this reference post-dates publication of Lawlor's text, the point is not new. Bain Attwood reminds us that John Mulvaney has since 1969 been vigorous in contesting the notion of a static, unchanging Aboriginal society.³⁷ In the 1988 *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Fred Myers points out that the contemporary critiques of studies that lock observations of hunter-gatherers into a permanent record of their past, thus failing to take into account their complex histories, tapped into an already existing body of scholarship that challenged the same portrayal of Native Americans.³⁸ Thus Lawlor has much more in common with the progressive Darwinist ideology he spurns,³⁹ and in fact is keeping current many of its superseded constructions, than with scholarship and research conducted over the last two or three decades. Even if familiar with this latter work, however, Lawlor would necessarily have to ignore it for it does not offer him the 'traditional' foundations he requires upon which to build his idealised culture.

Keeping to his agenda of locating Aborigines in the past and denying them a history, Lawlor both writes contemporary Aboriginalities out of his book and prescribes what it is to be a real Aborigine. As Nicholas Thomas argues, Lawlor 'marginalises not only urban Aboriginal cultures, but any forms not closely associated with traditional bush gathering'.⁴⁰ For example, one area in which Lawlor totally ignores a vital component of Aboriginal cultures for well over a hundred years is that of competitive sport. He asserts that 'The competitive spirit and the attitudes and drives associated with it have no place in the life of tribal Aborigines. None of their games and activities involve competition'.⁴¹ In support of this he paints an Edenic childhood where children, instead of competing, run 'wild, shouting, and dancing', or play peacefully and contentedly amongst themselves or alone.⁴² Stretching this point further and subscribing to a theory that if it was not Western toilet training that has psychologically scarred and socially damaged western children then it is sexual repression,⁴³ Lawlor holds that the battlefield of sport is a manifestation of 'our' unliberated energies. Therefore sport is advanced as a sign of non-Aboriginal psychosis arising from the failings of Western culture. This is contrasted with an idealised Aboriginal society that promoted such a balanced, healthy and fulfilled life that Aborigines had no requirement for nor interest in competition:

Aboriginal tribal people do not derive enjoyment or excitement from competition — it is antithetical to their sense of kinship and reciprocity with all ... When Aboriginal boys were introduced to competitive football, the results were often bedlam and injury because, in their traditional society, aggression and confrontation were sanctioned only for the purpose of punishing those who transgressed Dreamtime Laws.⁴⁴

The inference is that the many thousands of Aborigines who today and in the past have participated in sport and/or enjoy it have somehow shed their heritage. Yet in the acknowledgments Lawlor thanks the Tiwi Land Council for allowing him 'to experience firsthand some of the culture and the depth and warmth of the Aboriginal people'.⁴⁵ Sport, and Australian Rules football in particular, has for many decades been an integral part of Tiwi life.⁴⁶ It would be all but impossible to visit Bathurst Island and not be aware of the Tiwi's consuming interest and participation in football. How then, according to Lawlor's thesis, have they maintained cultural 'depth and warmth' under the onslaught of the competitive spirit?

It is also very doubtful that Lawlor's thesis that pre-contact Aboriginal cultures eschewed competitive games is correct. To take but one example, there are numerous reports from disparate regions of boomerangs being used in differing forms of spirited competition by adults and children.⁴⁷ However, not finding in contemporary Aboriginal cultures the opposing attributes to the West that he seeks, Lawlor adorns 'Aboriginal tribal' people with the particularities he wants them to display.

It needs to be noted that Lawlor believes he is describing those practices which comprise part of an 'eternal tradition', and that the Aboriginal people he consults are those allegedly working towards 'a renaissance of the universal aspects of their culture'.⁴⁸ As just noted, this presumably involves a turning away from those activities, such as sport, that are anathema to these postulated 'eternal' traits. According to Lawlor, housing, clothes, reading, writing, agriculture and trade for any reason other than the sharing of gifts for spiritual enrichment, also involve ways of living that remove Aborigines from the 'traditions' that need to be 'preserved' if humankind is to survive.⁴⁹

As a key point in his concerns over the rents he perceives in the social fabric of Western culture, Lawlor provides a highly idealised account of Aboriginal gender relations as a model of genuine equality and mutual respect. This he contrasts with what is experienced in the West and East, where Christianity and Islam have suppressed the 'fertility rites' based on 'metaphysical erotic sources'.⁵⁰ Thus the Aboriginal custom of bestowing women in marriage 'reflects the metaphysical sense of woman as the gift of life, to be bestowed and received, rather than a prize to be won or a possession to be acquired'.⁵¹ He then attempts to demonstrate over several pages how much more successfully than in Western cultures the nature of Aboriginal sexuality and love function to fulfil 'powerful psychological needs', engender social stability, and intimately affiliate one with nature.⁵² Yet, as Nicholas Thomas states, Aboriginal 'gender relations [are] generally thought to entail domination and a variety of social and ritual asymmetries across most of the continent'.⁵³ This is certainly supported by research amongst the Yolgnu. Here there is evidence suggesting women's considerable emotional and sexual unhappiness in the marriage system, and that sexual relations are subject to stringent taboos and repressions that equal if not exceed those imposed by non-Aboriginal beliefs and cultures.⁵⁴

Extending the notion of Aboriginal naturalness and ease with their bodies, Lawlor asserts that 'Aborigines are extremely uninhibited about body functions'.⁵⁵ Where, however, is the evidence to support this? Responding to the counter-culture's naïve idealisation of tribal life, Janice Newton points out that:

Field work in a so-called tribal society soon acquaints the ethnographer with the importance of ascriptive roles, the existence of inequality in male and female statuses and roles, the presence of inequality between families, and the existence of taboos and fears surrounding the natural functions of the body.⁵⁶

As Lawlor has done no actual fieldwork he has not been confronted with the daily functioning of a 'traditional tribe' and hence his idealised fantasy built from embellishing basic anthropological texts remains unchallenged by the flesh of the living. Nevertheless, he goes to considerable effort to explain the 'true' nature of any taboos associated with bodily functions, reasons which are inevitably more wholesome than the basis for their management in the West and other cultures. Thus when considering the customary prohibitions and restrictive practices relating to menstruation, Lawlor finds that they did not arise from fear, disgust or notions of uncleanness as in Judeo-Christian and Islamic traditions, but from the fact that menstrual blood and menstruating women 'are considered extremely sacred'.⁵⁷ As Lawlor believes magnetism to be a 'sacred science' and blood a 'sensitive magnetic conductor' that enables Aborigines 'to communicate with the memory and mind of Earth',⁵⁸ this 'sacredness' is given an empirical and rational as opposed to superstitious foundation.

The fashionable propensity to describe peoples such as Aborigines as living an idealistic existence untroubled by many of the problems confronting the West, not only hinders our understanding of these peoples and cultures, but also has the potential to work against their interests. As Fred Myers asserts:

When we seek to show that [hunter-gatherers] are freer, less violent, more egalitarian, or less territorial than ourselves, we distort their reality, defining it largely in terms immediately meaningful to our own debates.⁵⁹

He goes on to say that ‘such constructions may also affect them politically’. *Voices of the First Day* reads like a script written for the very purpose of illustrating the veracity of this argument. Lawlor first establishes the present as a condition where the Western world, perceived as monolithic and homogenised, is engendering the conditions — social, psychological, sexual and ecological — that will inevitably lead to its own destruction. This theme, in one form or another, is the premise for his entire project.⁶⁰ The various proposals to deal with some of these issues, as put forward by scientists, academics and the green movement, among others, are summarily dismissed as perpetuating the current crises. They are incapable of introducing the necessary structural changes for their solutions are offered within the rationalist framework that is responsible for the problems identified.⁶¹ What is needed instead is ‘a deep concurrent linguistic, neural, psychophysical, and spiritual transformation at the very core of our being’.⁶² Through *Voices* Lawlor wants to ‘open our minds’ to the concepts that he believes can bring about this transformation, and which allegedly offer humankind the greatest prospect of survival, together with emotional, spiritual, social and sexual security and fulfilment. Aboriginal religions, spiritual beliefs, and assorted cultural practices are literally bent to this cause. He presents a utopian society in which the constituents live a ceaselessly exuberant and joyous life in a paradisaical garden, where song and dance spontaneously erupt. Even the wildlife is drawn into this fairy-tale vision. ‘Unlike the aggressive predatorial placenta mammals that emerged in other parts of the world, marsupials are peaceful, nocturnal creatures, which do not prey on humans or any other species’.⁶³ This is the ‘world of the picnic’, that lost but reclaimable imagined world that so beckons the primitivists.⁶⁴

It is in this Arcadian fantasy that Lawlor wants to imprison Aborigines:

It is important to recognise that the Aboriginal way of life retains the seed of human culture. It is of great importance to humanity to retain and protect this seed. The thwarted attempts by Aboriginal leaders and communities to obtain land rights over some of the uninhabited regions of Australia so that they can practice their traditional way of life is a significant issue for our entire civilisation.⁶⁵

Besides the fact that *no* Aborigines are calling for land so that they can resume a ‘traditional’ life as envisaged by Lawlor — remembering that this would be a life without such things as sports, housing, clothes, reading or writing — this passage demonstrates how Lawlor is not according respect to Aboriginal cultures because of their significance unto themselves, but because of their utility in supposedly meeting the needs of a ‘deteriorated and purulent’ West.⁶⁶ In order to save the planet and therefore themselves, Aborigines, who now experience a lifestyle that differs to the one they could have expected to lead prior to colonisation, must return to the illusory state that Lawlor has decreed represents their traditional existence. So the West can sup from the supposed origins of human culture as the need dictates, Aborigines are to be denied any opportunities other than ceaselessly replicating a fantasised rendering of their past in reserves set aside for them.⁶⁷

It is not necessary to list the many factors that render Lawlor’s proposal impossible. In addition to the racist primitivism in which he seeks to permanently imprison Aborigines, is the problem that the people whom he wants to staff his remote centres of ‘seed culture’ do not exist, nor have they ever. As indicated by

the few examples discussed, it is possible to demonstrate on an almost page by page basis that the culture Lawlor describes is nothing more than a phantasm. In the 391 pages of narrative in which he claims that respect for Aborigines guided his hand, this is all that is ever encountered. Lawlor may ‘shudder to think how this compassionate, humane, and dignified culture was ripped apart by the blind greed and punishing desperation of a colonialist convict mentality’,⁶⁸ but in reality, as the fabrication of data indicates, it is his own culture that he is shuddering for. The peoples and the culture that he conjures in *Voices of the First Day* are the products of his disillusionment, fleshed out upon distorted skeletons arbitrarily wrenched from anthropological publications. The Aborigines in Lawlor’s text, and the culture they bear, have no actuality beyond the shaping force of his disillusionment. This in itself raises issues of concern — so do his attempts to substantiate his fictional people through the misuse of anthropological and historical sources. The uninformed reader could feel reassured that Lawlor’s portrayal of Aboriginal peoples and their cultures is supported by the authority of anthropologists. That Lawlor, on the strength of his book, is quoted as a reputable commentator on Aborigines in articles exposing Marlo Morgan’s *Mutant Message Down Under* as a work of fantasy, serves to confirm the book’s inferred anthropological veracity. And to take what for me is a local example, the fact that Monash University’s Humanities and Social Sciences Library has catalogued *Voices of the First Day* as a book belonging to the ‘religion of other origin’ category — on the same shelf as Charlesworth *et al*’s *Religion in Aboriginal Australia*⁶⁹ — can only serve to broaden the assumed sense of authority from which Lawlor speaks. For these reasons, Lawlor’s fabrications cannot be simply dismissed as being of little or no consequence.

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- 1 See for example, E Stockton, *The Aboriginal Gift: Spirituality for a Nation*, Alexandria, 1995; J Cowan, *Messengers of the Gods: Tribal Elders Reveal the Ancient Wisdom of the Earth*, Milsons Point, 1993; J Cowan, *Two Men Dreaming: a Memoir, a Journey*, Rose Bay, 1995; H Arden, *Dreamkeepers: A Spirit-Journey into Aboriginal Australia*, New York, 1995; M Furlong, *Flight of the Kingfisher*, Hammersmith, 1996; P McCloy, *The Survival Dreaming*, Lindfield, 1995.
- 2 R Lawlor, *Voices of the First Day: Awakening in the Aboriginal Dreamtime*, Rochester, 1991.
- 3 M Morgan, *Mutant Message Down Under*, New York, 1994.
- 4 Elaine Adams, ‘Ooota, a magic lotion and a chosen mutant: experts scoff at book on trek across Australia’, *Kansas City Star*, 28 June 1992, p A13.
- 5 Susan Wyndham, ‘The mystery of Marlo Morgan down under’, *Weekend Australian: Australian Magazine*, 17-18 December, 1994, pp 26-8, 53-4.
- 6 Gareth Griffiths, ‘Mixed up messages down under: the Marlo Morgan “hoax”: a textual travesty of Aboriginal culture’, *Ulitarra*, no 9, 1996, pp 78-9.
- 7 Barry Hill, ‘Travelling towards the other’, *Overland*, no 130, Autumn 1993, p 11.
- 8 Lawlor, op. cit., p 7.
- 9 *ibid.*, p 151.
- 10 *ibid.*, pp 8, 14.
- 11 See Peter Thorslev, ‘The wild man’s revenge’, in E Dudley, M E Novak (eds), *The Wild Man Within: An Image in Western Thought from the Renaissance to Romanticism*, Pittsburgh, 1972, p 281.
- 12 In proposing that Australia, and in particular Tasmania, is the birthplace of *Homo sapiens*, and that Aborigines, especially Tasmanian Aborigines, remain the original, primal people, Lawlor is revisiting theories that date from the 1860s, theories which have been categorically rejected (see Tim Murray, ‘Tasmania and the constitution of “the dawn of humanity”’, *Antiquity*, vol 66, no 252, September 1992, pp 732-36). Whilst Lawlor’s text and bibliography indicate that he has not consulted this early work, it is significant that through yet another explanatory system — in this instance magnetism — he is reintroducing a past construction of Aborigines in order to place them in the service of yet another origin myth.
- 13 Lawlor, op. cit., p 86. Lawlor is referring to the 1981 speculations of the biochemist Allan Wilson (see Lawlor, op. cit., pp 24-7). Preliminary mutation counts of Aboriginal mitochondrial DNA

- revealed unexpected patterns and base changes. Wilson provocatively suggested that this pointed to Australia as the origin of *Homo sapiens*. This ‘discovery’ was proved false almost immediately (see M H Brown, *The Search for Eve*, New York, 1990, pp 84-7, 98).
- 14 A Memmi, *The Coloniser and the Colonised*, London, 1990, p 164.
 - 15 Lawlor, op. cit., p 86.
 - 16 *ibid.*, p 87.
 - 17 *ibid.*, p 86.
 - 18 Quoted in M E Novak, ‘The wild man comes to tea’, in Dudley, Novak, op. cit., p 201.
 - 19 Lawlor, op. cit., pp 91-2.
 - 20 The sequence I use in these examples indicates in order: page number in *Voices*, end note referred to, then Lawlor’s end note reference which I have standardised: Lawlor, op. cit., p 79, en12, Bernard Smith, ‘The first European depictions’, in I Donaldson, T Donaldson (eds), *Seeing the First Australians*, North Sydney, 1985, pp 21-34.
 - 21 D J Mulvaney, *Encounters in Place: Outsiders and Aboriginal Australians 1606 — 1985*, St Lucia, 1989, pp 29-31.
 - 22 Lawlor, op. cit., p 81, en17, J Urry, ‘Savage sportsmen’, in Donaldson, Donaldson, op. cit., pp 56-8.
 - 23 Lawlor, op. cit., p 83, en19, 20, G Williams, ‘Reactions on Cook’s voyage’, in Donaldson, Donaldson, op. cit., pp 41-2.
 - 24 Monaghan, P. Untitled *Booklist* ‘Review’ of Lawlor, op. cit., (<http://www.gotoit.com/titles/vofidati.htm#Reviews>), 27 April 1998.
 - 25 Lawlor, op. cit., pp 65, 233; see also pp 232-33, 237.
 - 26 *ibid.*, pp 81, 86.
 - 27 *ibid.*, pp 80-1.
 - 28 See H T Lewis, ‘Fire Technology and Resource Management in Aboriginal North America and Australia’, in N M Williams, E S Hunn (eds), *Resource Managers: North American and Australian Hunter-Gatherers*, Boulder, 1982, p 60, figure 2.
 - 29 L Ryan, *The Aboriginal Tasmanians*, St Leonards; 1996, pp 17, 21, 23, 24, 38.
 - 30 J Flood, *Archaeology of the Dreamtime*, Sydney, 1983, pp 213-14.
 - 31 Lawlor, op. cit., p 11.
 - 32 *ibid.*, p 151.
 - 33 *ibid.*, p 159.
 - 34 *ibid.*, p 293; see also pp 65, 190, 237, 325, 376.
 - 35 P Hountondji, *African Philosophy: Myth and Reality*, London, 1983, p 164.
 - 36 Kim Akerman, ‘Tradition and Change in Aspects of Contemporary Australian Aboriginal Religious Objects’, in C Anderson (ed.), ‘Politics of the secret’, *Oceania*, Monograph 45, Sydney, 1995, pp 43-9; see also Tim Murray, ‘Creating a Post-Mabo Archaeology of Australia’, in B Attwood (ed.), *In the Age of Mabo: History, Aborigines and Australia*, St Leonards, 1996, pp 73-87; T Griffiths, *Hunters and Collectors: The Antiquarian Imagination in Australia*, Melbourne, 1996, pp 93-4.
 - 37 Bain Attwood, ‘Making History: Imagining Aborigines and Australia’, in T Bonyhady, T Griffiths (eds), *Prehistory to Politics: John Mulvaney, the Humanities and the Public Intellectual*, Carlton South, 1996, pp 98-116.
 - 38 Fred Myers, ‘Critical trends in the study of hunter-gatherers’, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, vol 17, 1988, p 263.
 - 39 See Lawlor, op. cit., pp 23-4, 34, 67, 76, 91, 137-38, 317
 - 40 N Thomas, *Colonialism’s Culture: Anthropology, Travel and Government*, Princeton, 1994, p 176.
 - 41 Lawlor, op. cit., p 173.
 - 42 *ibid.*, p 173.
 - 43 *ibid.*, pp 154-55, 169-77, 209-31.
 - 44 *ibid.*, p 176.
 - 45 *ibid.*, p xii.
 - 46 See C Tatz, *Obstacle Race: Aborigines in Sport*, Sydney, 1996, pp 300-01.
 - 47 P Jones, *Boomerang: Behind an Australian Icon*, Kent Town, 1996, pp 70-7.
 - 48 Lawlor, op. cit., pp 10-11.
 - 49 *ibid.*, pp 61, 126, 140, 141, 175, 228, 312, 387.
 - 50 *ibid.*, p 211.
 - 51 *ibid.*, pp 213-14.
 - 52 *ibid.*, pp 225-31. It should also be noted, to take but one example from this section, that Lawlor’s

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- explanation of how Aborigines employed their women in the role of ritual prostitute so as to satisfy the lust of roving parties of men on the hunt, directly contradicts on several points the information provided in his cited source (Lawlor, op. cit., pp 229-30, en28, R Tonkinson, *The Mardudjara Aborigines: Living the Dream in Australia's Desert*, Orlando, 1978, p 120; see also another of Lawlor's key references, R M Berndt, C H Berndt, *The World of the First Australians*, Canberra, 1988, p 357).
- 53 Thomas, op. cit., p 175; See also Annette Hamilton, 'A complex strategical situation: gender and power in Aboriginal Australia', in N Grieve, P Grimshaw (eds), *Australian Women: Feminist Perspectives*, Melbourne, 1981, pp 69-85.
- 54 J Money, J E Cawte, G N Bianchi, B Nurcombe, 'Sex training and traditions in Arnhem Land', in G E Kearney, P R De Lacey, G R Davidson (eds), *The Psychology of Aboriginal Australians*, Sydney, 1973, pp 401-15.
- 55 Lawlor, op. cit., p 169.
- 56 Janice Newton, 'Aborigines, tribes and the counterculture', *Social Analysis*, no. 23, August 1988, p 61; See also Money et al., op. cit.; A O Lovejoy, G Boas, *Primitivism and Related Ideas in Antiquity*, New York, 1965, p 9.
- 57 Lawlor, op. cit., p 206.
- 58 *ibid.*, p 111.
- 59 Myers, op. cit., p 264; see also Lovejoy and Boas, op. cit., p 7; M Torgovnick, *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellectuals, Modern Lives*, Chicago, 1991, pp 8-9.
- 60 See for example, Lawlor, op. cit., pp 7, 58, 59, 62, 77, 137, 139, 140, 141, 169, 172, 176, 181, 192, 208, 236, 252, 271, 273, 275, 324, 351, 384, 385, 387.
- 61 *ibid.*, pp 149-51, 386-87.
- 62 *ibid.*, pp 386-87.
- 63 *ibid.*, p 280.
- 64 Hayden White, 'The Forms of wildness: archaeology of an idea', in Dudley, Novak, op. cit., pp 27, 26. This also provides another indication of Lawlor's reliance upon out-dated constructs of Aborigines developed under the scientific paradigms he spurns. The fact that Aborigines did not have to contend with fierce animals (nor compete with 'higher races') was a popular Darwinian theory as to why their wits had supposedly remained dulled (see W B Spencer, 'Chapter II: The Aborigines of Australia', in G H Knibbs (ed.), *Federal Handbook: Prepared in Connection with the Eighty-Fourth Meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science*, 1914, p 33). Because Lawlor relies on the notion of Aborigines being an ancient people bearing an ancient culture, rather than turning to contemporary theorems, he simply changes the values accorded to concepts long rejected by most working in the field of Aboriginal Studies.
- 65 Lawlor, op. cit., p 138; see also pp 386-87.
- 66 *ibid.*, p 386.
- 67 *ibid.*, pp 386-87.
- 68 *ibid.*, p 248.
- 69 M Charlesworth, H Morphy, D Bell, K Maddock (eds), *Religion in Aboriginal Australia: An Anthology*, St Lucia, 1984.